This page was exported from - Shelburne Free Press
Export date: Fri Oct 30 8:00:08 2026 / +0000 GMT

It is up to Canadians to remain free

by BRIAN LOCKHART

Freedom ? it's something we take for granted in this country.

Have you ever been afraid of going on a trip or travelling across the province?

Have you ever worried that your neighbour might be spying on you and passing information to a government agency?

Have you ever worried that your local grocery store will not have any food because government rationing hasn't gotten around to supplying your town?

Have you ever been concerned that the afternoon barbecue you planned at your home may become the object of secret police surveillance because more than three people gathering in one place may be part of a secret anti-government plot?

You've probably answered ?no' to all of those questions.

If you answered ?yes', you are definitely living an inappropriate lifestyle.

We take freedom for granted, because we have it.

A guy I used to work with decided to travel across Eastern Europe through countries that were part of the Soviet Union for a vacation in the 1970s. He told me that he just thought it would be an interesting trip. While everything went smoothly, he said he was under constant scrutiny and suspicion.

Why would a Westerner even want to visit Eastern Europe was the main theme.

He realized his movements were being monitored. To the authorities, a Westerner meant he could also be a spy. He checked in at a small inn, and the innkeeper insisted he turn over his passport for the night.

When asked why the innkeeper needed the passport, the reply was, ?If I don't keep it from you while you are staying here, I will be arrested by the authorities in the morning.?

One thing my friend noticed was the horrible amount of pollution. With all industry under government control, there was no other agency to oppose the fact that a factory was polluting the air and killing local residents.

He said he had to shower at the end of every day to remove the grime, dirt, and ash that fell out of the sky from factory smokestacks, choking the life out of the town's residents. The local residents shrugged it off as a part of life.

I just finished reading an essay by a woman who grew up in a county under the Soviet Union. She has since relocated to the West.

She described living under the ?warmth of collectivism' as it was described by their Soviet oppressors. Homeownership was not allowed. You lived where the authorities told you to live.

You had no choice when it came to employment. You were given a job, and you had to do it whether you liked it or not. It was your job for life. Private enterprise was illegal, and those who attempted to earn a living through self-employment were punished.

Travel was very restricted, even within the socialist world. If you had an interest in visiting the west, you would be in serious

trouble. All information was a government-approved version of reality. Even if you witnessed an incident and spoke about it as a witness, you would be considered a ?problem.'

There was a general feeling of fear in Soviet-controlled society. They learned what not to say. The walls had ears and so did your classmates.

Lining up to buy consumer goods is what she described as a ?national sport.'

You had to line up to buy food, shoes, furniture, books, and a decent winter coat.

Often, people stood in a line just hoping something they needed might become available.

Quality in any product did not exist. Since the state controlled everything and produced everything, you would have to be happy with substandard products.

The mindset of the population was that of fear all the time. If one person messed up, everyone was punished. If one person said the wrong thing, everyone was threatened.

This type of fear trains people to become their own police agency ? and not in a good way.

Bananas were a big thing. They arrived hard and green, and people learned to wait until they ripened.

The writer stated that bananas were proof that ?somewhere out there, beyond your grey daily reality, normal life existed.'

Yes, we have freedoms we take for granted.

Upon the completion of the U.S. Constitution, statesman Benjamin Franklin was asked if they had created a monarchy or a republic.

He replied, ?A republic, if you can keep it.'

That was a warning to citizens that they are the ones responsible for maintaining a free society. It is also up to Canadian citizens that we remain free from oppression, at any cost.